

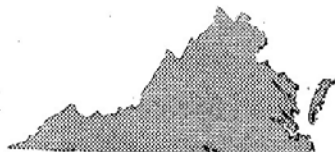


Counterpoint

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VIRGINIA



To boost student achievement the Virginia Department of Education,

VDOE, is using a portion of the funds received in its State Improvement Grant from the U. S. Department of Education to develop model Instructional Support Team or IST sites, in 12 elementary schools.

Technical assistance from the Instructional Consultation Center at the University of Maryland has played an instrumental role in the IST initiative. Along with site development work, center staff help selected staff members at Training and Technical Assistance Centers at three Virginia universities become skilled in providing consultation and training services to existing and future IST sites.

Instructional Support Teams provide student intervention and staff development services, such as individual coaching of classroom teachers, implementing instructional strategies determined by collaborating team case managers and teachers using curriculum-based assessment practices.

Intensive training of team members in assessment, collaboration and problem-solving strategies is a hallmark of team development. A key element of the effectiveness of an IST is the full-time position held by the team member identified as the IST teacher.

In Virginia, the role of the IST teacher has three components: staff development, team development and case management.

Perhaps the greatest impetus behind the VDOE launching of the IST initiative was data covering implementation of the IST model of service delivery in Pennsylvania and New York. Of particular interest to department staff was significant reductions in testing referrals and retentions reported in various professional publications.

Similar to Pennsylvania and New York, first-year findings from the oldest IST sites in Virginia revealed the reduction in multidisciplinary evaluation referrals ranged from approximately 25 to 75 percent.

Several intriguing observations were also contained in these findings. For instance, a few staff members (e.g., diagnosticians) reported with reductions in the evaluation referrals, their functions were changing. Elaborating, several school psychologists found they could dramatically increase the amount of time allocated to intervening with students as testing caseloads dropped.

In the coming school year (2002-2003), the VDOE plans to add six IST sites in selected areas of the state. With the addition of these proposed sites, all eight superintendent's regions will have at least two model sites that can be visited by staff from school divisions interested in learning about the IST model of services delivery and strategies for developing high quality teams.

If you would like more information about the IST Initiative in Virginia, please contact Don Fleming at the VDOE. He can be reached at (804) 225-2185 or dfleming@mail.vak12ed.edu.